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Ahimsa Paramodharma in Vamsee Juluri's Saraswati's Intelligence

In an age when recreating mythological tales is in vogue with Amish Tripathi's *The Immortals Of Meluha*, *The Scion of Ikshvaku*, etc.; Kavita Kane's *Karna's Wife*; and Ashok Banker's multi-volume retelling of the Ramayana, we have Vamsee Juluri's recreation or rather fictional depiction of Hanuman and Kishkindha in *Saraswati's Intelligence*. In this fiction Juluri has instilled in the minds of the reader the principle of Ahimsa Paramodharmaha. Through this novel the writer reminds us that however powerful we may be in being able to control things it is most important to be human with love, compassion and respect for all creatures on earth. The more powerful we are physically and intellectually by following religious doctrines, the more are we morally bound to care and nurture with kindness the other beings which are less fortunate.

The Indian principles of Ahimsa Paramodharma, *Sarve Janaha Sukino Bhavanthu* and *Vasudeiva Kutumbakam* reach the western world through such novels. There are references and echoes of Indian Philosophy in Whitman, Thoreau, Dreiser and Emerson's works in American Literature. All of them were well versed in a thorough understanding of Upanishads and The Gita and could reveal their principles in their works. Now it is encouraging that our own writers are spreading our philosophy and reaching out to the western world through fiction

based on mythology . In Vamsee Juluri's Gandhi: A Spiritual Biography what he observes is relevant : "that while spirituality may be more than morality, it cannot be less."

Kishkindha Chronicles is set in an era before the dawn of human civilization. There is a sudden invasion by some deadly creatures in the land of Hanuman. Hanuman is the protagonist and he along with the subjects of Kishkindha are in danger of losing their era of peace and their most valued principle of *ahimsa paramodharma* which forbids the spilling of blood in their land. The carnivorous invaders from the north were so ferocious that they could destroy all living beings in Kishkindha and drink their blood. Their invasion would destroy the peace and sanctity of Kishkindhan people.

Moreover Hanuman the would be crown prince is exiled to make way for empress Riksharaja's son Vali to ascend the throne. Sugreeva Vali's brother, GuruViswamitra and Guru Vashisht enable Hanuman to confront all odds and emerge successful in the end without compromising on his ideals and the rigorous code of not spilling blood. Vishwamitra notices that there is something Divine in Hanuman and that he and Hanuman could save Kishkindha from the invaders together. Vishwamitra's observation of Hanuman's eyes is as follows:

Those are not eyes that I just saw, but wells, he thought. Wells into which I am going to fall, because i see something in them that i do not see anywhere else. I see hope for Kishkindha in them. I see all of Kishkindha in them. They hold all the sorrow of existence, its ultimate pointlessness, and yet make peace with them, a peace with strength. This boy is not ordinary. And now he and I are bound together the outcaste and the unwitting guru.⁹⁰

The insistence on humaneness and the ability of Hanuman and his team to deal with the blood thirsty invaders and establish peace in an affectionate and compassionate manner is what makes the novel quite appealing.

Wendy Doniger in her book, *The Hindus –An Alternative History* has explained the term *Ahimsa* stating how vegetarianism insists that it was not necessary to kill in order to survive:

Arjuna, the heroic warrior of the Mahabharata, the great ancient Sanskrit poem about a tragic war, excuses the violence of war by saying, “Creatures live on creatures, the stronger on the weaker. The mongoose eats mice, just as the cat eats the mongoose; the dog devours the cat, your majesty, and wild beasts eat the dog. Even ascetics [tapasas] cannot stay alive without killing” [12.15.16-24]. The text here justifies human violence by the violence that is rampant in the animal world. Yet the most common sense of ahimsa refers to humans’ decision to rise above animal violence. Vegetarianism, both as an ideal and as a social fact in India, challenges Arjuna’s belief that animals must inevitably feed on one another and attempts to break the chain of alimentary violence simply by affirming that it is not, in fact, necessary to kill in order to eat. 21

There lies the difference between humans who can rise above the basic animal instinct to kill and establish a amiable atmosphere on earth.

The valour of a king who is well versed in war tactics is, not in exhibiting his prowess in ruthless killing but being able to adjust his war strategy in such a controlled manner that he is able to instill fear and be able to defeat his enemies without destroying or annihilating them. Moreover Hanuman and his team go to the extent of rehabilitating and affording solace and succour to them by offering them food, medicine , and mental and physical relaxation through yogic exercises and ultimately turning foes into friends creating Heaven on Earth.

The novel begins with a description of Kishkinda as a Utopian world where “most conflicts , such as there were, got quickly settled by appeals to reason and displays of persuasive emotion rather than anything more damaging. It was rare to see blood in Kishkindha.”16-17. All the

residents of the state were so affectionate towards one another that Hanuman's father Kesari observes , "by Goddess Saraswati's grace , we have not had to face a crisis of any great import in a long time. The children may have got a few bruises while playing, but even that-through timely medicine and patient forgiveness-is never allowed to violate our *parama dharma*." 21. Explaining the theme of peaceful co-existence further Vishwamitra adds:

The *parama dharma* is what keeps Kishkinda peaceful ...It was Goddess Saraswati's first and oldest law of civilization. In the old days, when much of the world was covered with fire, they say the Goddess herself appeared in the form of a river, and she cooled the fire down slowly, into steam, into water, into earth and then into our ancestors, Shiva and Vishnu. Then from them came all the creatures of the world. The trees, the fishes, everyone, Hanuman and Sugreeva included... The rule was really meant at first to make sure that none of Mata Saraswati's creations would turn on each other. 69-70 Time and again the protective Goddess prevails and prevents natural calamities within the earth from rising up and devouring her children. More than natural calamities there is another way through which destruction occurs. It is the fire which

appears in the lives of the earth's creatures, in their words, their actions, in their thoughts and desires. Sometimes it finds containment in Goddess Saraswati's grace, in wisdom, and it becomes something good. Sometimes ,it does not. It explodes.It engulfs.

It destroys and leaves great sorrow in its wake 71

The children of Kishkinda were taught to keep anger and fear under control. These two emotions if left uncontrolled, they would devour everything up and destroy nations. So in order to keep everything in order and maintain *Dharma* children should know "how much force they should use upon others and for what purpose".71The children could play, fight, but shedding blood was forbidden. "The integrity of her creations would not ever be violated. Not a drop of blood would be shed recklessly in Kishkindha."71The ruling deity of Kishkinda Mata

Saraswati's opinion was that, "Once we consume blood, the fire in it takes over our will, the blood eats more blood, through us, and then it devours us from within too."⁷³

There are references to the different sanskars -The First Ceremony probably referring to the *Annaprasan* Ceremony when the child is initiated to having different kinds of solid food and The Second Ceremony probably referring to *Aksharabhyasam* Ceremony when the child is sent to the Gurukul for education. Here also Hanuman even as a child is shown as being intelligent enough to know , "what the second ceremony was all about. It wasn't about memorizing the names of relatives and the quantities of fruits and trees, but simply about recognizing one's place in the world, that everyone was connected and important".¹¹³ Moreover Hanuman remembered all the stories told by his mother of the God who danced with one leg up, of sages, serpents, kings, demigods, "who walked across the earth and into the lives of its creatures without being seen by any but the great sages."¹¹⁶ there are references to planets, the moon and to the mountains to which the Ganeshas prayed to and Hanuman's observation is that "Everything was watching them, and everything could only be perfect; *paripurnam*, was the word ...it felt complete, like it was all as Goddess Saraswati had wanted it to be, planet or no planet".¹¹⁷ This feeling of completeness and connectedness of all creatures in the universe is what enables him to forget, forgive, accept and restore health and vitality in the deadly invaders.

When Kishkindha faces imminent invasion from the north by a new and deadly race of beings that destroy and devour anything that is living, it was Sugreeva, Hanuman and the Ganas who faced the deadly creatures earlier and were not interested in a war. Hanuman wondered about the horrors of war. "He had seen it literally, in the wounds and injuries and recklessly torn open *apacharas* of war. He had seen nerves, blood vessels, organs, pulsating, pounding, trying to restore their dignity to themselves under violence"³¹¹ He reflects a great deal about war and even though he was well equipped for war, he hoped that there would be no war and

he observes, “If we can use our strength wisely to defuse the fire that rages in these creatures, then maybe we can place them in a position where, slowly, they see themselves as part of the Goddess’s creation again²²³ He feels that . “A peace obtained over time is better than a victory won in war...A war can defeat an enemy on the horizon, but what about the enemy that comes into our mind, the enemy of fear, mistrust, suspicion? We are living on the edge already”.¹⁹² Vali on the other hand had no idea of what it was to face and fight them . He had been in a Utopia in Kishkindha for quite a long time and all that he wanted was to fight a war and exhibit his prowess.

The fact remained that he(Vali)had a reasonably skilled and highly motivated force.

The members of the Vali Sena were raw but then they had come with a motivation no one else really felt and that was a desire for glory. Like Vali they had known only the peace that had lasted for a long time and that seemed to stifle their very nature. They wanted fights and stories about those fights they could tell their grandchildren.¹⁹⁹

Quite contrary to the views of Vali are the views of Hanuman and Vishwamitra who feel that these creatures are not fighting to escape boredom or show their prowess but are doing so out of necessity to survive. The place where the battle is to take place is described as being dry and barren as opposed to their own verdant valleys and hills. The lack of fresh green vegetation as food for them is also given as a reason for their resorting to wounding and sucking blood of animals as big as elephants to satisfy their hunger. Viswamitra observed:

They come to eat us. That is all. There is more life teeming in our part of Kishkindha with its sunlight and rivers than the cold north where the Goddess sends even their dreams to sleep. Life was sparse to begin with, in the north, but something must have happened, something bad, for Goddess Saraswati’s creation to have taken such a desperate, ugly course...do not forget “desperate”. We have been fortunate. Our tree-

mothers grow well, and we have no dearth of food, no lack of warmth and light. All we have to do is to steady our *dharma* and minimize actions that might damage it.¹⁶¹ Also he feels that the creatures are fighting because they are hungry and desperately need food. Moreover unlike kishkindhans they have not been initiated with the intelligence and knowledge of finding the right kind of food.

All this horror is because they believe that we are their food. But we are not what they think we are. We are whole lives. We are families, friends, children of Mata Saraswati. We know what we can take and what we must not. We begin our lives praying for her to give us the intelligence to find food-our First Ceremony, which our parents conduct for us even as we are taking our first breaths.²²⁹

In the war with those deadly creatures their principle was to “Defeat not destroy”.¹⁶³ The war strategy to be used is not to kill them but to frighten them so that they get defeated. So the tactics which Hanuman uses when the enemy tries to tear off their limbs and arms is “to show them that we have whatever it is they are afraid of. Fire, light, sound. Teeth ,maybe”.¹⁷⁸

After instilling fear, restraining them and defeating them the victorious Kishkindhans also took good care of them. Even when they went for war the rishi’s students carried medicines in the form of bundles of herbs so that in case they accidentally hurt any one of those deadly creatures they could also immediately treat them. For instance the deadly creatures ‘with an apparent lack of restraint with their own children’,¹⁹¹ were ready to devour their own young ones and it so happened that a mother abandoned her wounded child in the enemy camp and ran away. Princess Vaishnavi observes in a large hearted manner that, “This earth has such a large heart that I cannot see why anyone would harm anyone else. I hope this child would be able to avert a conflict that really should not take place at all. I hope his mother would one day come and feed him with love”.¹⁹¹ Incidentally it was Guru Vashishta who treated the child with medicines and helped him regain health. The child when he was well fed with juices of

herbs, grass and recovered and his nature changed and he became sober, soft and well behaved like the others in Hanuman's camp. All other captured creatures also responded well to affectionate treatment of Vashishta and his students.

With a change in Environment and diet, gradually there is a change in behaviour of women, children and old men in the group, they are not afraid of sunlight and seem somewhat washed and clean and those creatures who had killed elephants, and birds now start feeding themselves with juices of small things in their shells. Even though they were slightly smaller in build their skins were shiny and smoother and they were calm and less violent.

When treated with love the creatures were able to respond suitably.

Vashishta and Vishwamitra were surprised that some of the creatures could indeed be peaceful...Vishwamitra tried to talk patiently and gently with the creatures, just as he would to anyone else, without condescension. Hanuman noticed that they nodded and smiled a lot too. The children seemed to laugh at the sight of Vashishta's curious eyes as he touched and squeezed them here and there. They took some berries that Vashishta's students brought them, and ate them with relish. Then when they saw that their fingers were red, the younger children began to cry. Their mothers wiped their fingers and reassured them²³⁸

The hurt creatures were poured coconut water by Vaishnavi but they did not know how to collect it with their hands and drink it. Hanuman and his company felt pity and compassion at the ignorance of the creatures. "Yet those hands had not learned even how to take some water to one's lips".²⁸⁹

The captured and newly tamed creatures were treated with love and affection and rehabilitated by Kishkindhans and they also started responding in a less ferocious and cooperative manner. Step by step the non fighting companions crawled up to the medicinal fire, the next night they stopped drooling and on the third night started sleeping without nightmares. They also learnt

exercises from Vashishta's students and after the exercises, "As the Kishkindhans and the creatures all lay back on the earth ,in silence, in peace,it did not seem as if anyone or anything was different anymore".²⁹⁵

War only results in barrenness of both land as well as mind so Guru Viswamitra encourages the soldiers to freshen earth, mind and soul by planting saplings after praying for forgiveness for having indulged in war. "On the sixth morning after war, Vishwamitra offered a set of prayers to the ground to seek forgiveness for all the injury that had taken place there. The remaining soldiers cleaned the land thoroughly, and planted saplings and watered them".²⁹⁶ During rehabilitation the captives did not show any sign of regression and they were well behaved,content and some were soon going to be mothers too. Then they were accommodated in a Gurukula with Kamadhenu ready to give shelter to the most violent of creatures. They were fed on grass, the milk of Kamedhenu and some sweet white balls. "The Kamadhenu's milk contains the only energy that can wean the creatures off their hunger for blood."³⁰⁰ They became tame, were no longer aggressive and they were to attain training in worshipping Kamadhenus as well as their own mothers, learn their mothers' names and celebrate festivals and ceremonies all the year around. So in brief they would learn that all the world is their friend if they behave ' as a friend to all the world.'³⁰².

When Hanuman goes to the Sun Temple for prayer,the princess Vaishnavi , the daughter of Sun God proclaims that the group of lions in the temple who come walking towards her are her brothers. So much for Universal Brotherhood or *Vasudeiva Kutumbakam*. In the temple Hanuman gets to know the views of Vaishnavi's father and other *rishi*-s on *Dharma*:

Dharma is far more than what we are required to do or not to do. There is no list of things to get through to reap some reward in the end. *Dharma* is just the way everything is, without distortion, untruth and, most of all, without violence and destruction .So it

is for each one to recognize *Dharma* as the reality that we live in, and then decide on actions that will best support that reality.³¹⁷

Hanuman had always understood that all creatures small as well as large were God's creations and in it lies the mystery of creation and the beauty of the universe. "These are Goddess's creations, this beautiful princess, this strange child, this enchanted valley." ¹⁹³ In the novel it is not surprising that, "someone as small as Sugreeva was confident in his ability to protect his kind. That was indeed the life and spirit of dharma. Strength and size did not matter. Only the sense of kindness for others did, for the intelligence born of kindness could make up for what they lacked in cruelty".²⁰⁴

Bibliography

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